THE INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT OF OUR OPERATIVES.

Sir, — In your excellent journal, The Builder, of the 27th instant, you have given a most valuable article on the improvement of the intellectual condition of our artisans. If the subject-matter were carried fully out, and which I trust it will be hereafter, the greatest possible good would be done to that most important class—the operatives of this country. There is no doubt but you have hit one of the right nails on the head, and that competition, unless subjected to a wise and salutary scrutiny, is, from the seeds of mischief contained within its system, likely to overspread and choke up the intellectual energies of our artisans. But let us endeavour to discover wherein this evil lies. For why should architects and builders feel it necessary to compete, and be induced to give the work to be executed by those who have sent in the lowest price? There may be more reasons than one for this proceeding, but the one is very certain, and that is, the ignorance and narrow-mindedness on the part of certain employers; and the want of that appeal from the architects and builders to the employed, to warn them of the mischief so likely to ensue from that grinding down to the very lowest price per inch, and the screwing system of splitting farthings, in order to get the building reared for the sum proposed to be expended or subscribed—caring very little for its instability, its deformities and its inconsistencies; for as long as it appears to stand, the proprietors are satisfied with the result of their bargain.

There is no doubt but the architects and builders could cure this evil; it only requires the putting of their shoulders to the wheel, and the cure would accordingly come. And as you justly remark — "To workmen we would say,—put your own shoulders to the wheel, become masters of your trade—artisans, not mere labourers — artists if you can, able to give a 'because' for a 'why,'—make your work your pleasure. An upright man who will do this, cannot fail to rise, and better still, will pass a more useful and happier life." Indeed, the whole article is so true, and so much to the purpose, that I would advise all the parties — the employers, the architects, the builders, and the operatives, to read, learn, and inwardly digest the matter contained therein, and they would soon ascertain how essentially necessary it is that each of them should take the bull by the horns, to free themselves from the impending danger.

It is well known that the body of operatives is a most important one, and deserving of our encouragement; but the present state of things is against that encouragement to which they are justly entitled. Competition prices will not allow them time to think before they execute, nor to receive instruction in the arts, and without which they must remain labouring mechanics. An operative ought to be able to construct and draw the work he is employed to execute, and to know the designer's reasons for why it is to be so and so formed, that he may clearly see his way and enter readily into the spirit of his work—deriving an intellectual pleasure at every form he produces. This source of happiness to him would be certain if his faculties for the arts were legitimately exercised; but this is very seldom the case, as artisans cannot afford to pay for a mathematical and artistical education; and, therefore, youths must enter into their master's service uninstructed in construction and design—the two mental qualities of all others in building matters the most important. As our gentry require architects, the architects require builders, and builders require artisans;—the three classes should combine, and make a fund to be applied to the education of the sons of their workmen, in order to fit them for that business which they are destined to enter. Their faculties for the arts should then be rightly exercised and directed during their apprenticeship, which would not only make them more skilful in their calling, but more intellectual men, and advance them in the scale of society, and to which they would be entitled. Several instances have come under my notice, and the following will shew the advantages gained by such cultivation. About ten years ago some of my designs were being executed by some carpenters and joiners in Sussex, and as I was painting some pictures in the same place where the carpenters were executing my designs, I was enabled to instruct these men in the construction of geometrical problems in perspective, in drawing and design; and by shewing to them the value of natural forms in the animal and vegetable kingdom, and teaching them to become active and accurate observers in the boundless field of nature, they soon felt the value of such information; and whenever they had to execute such forms as were immediately derived from nature, they would go into the gardens and fields, and obtain the flowers and leaves of plants, and place them before them while they were executing such portions of the designs which were made up of similar flowers and foliage. And though these artisans came as carpenters to work at 25s. per week, they were so much improved in a few months in ability, that their wages were raised to 30s. per week, and in about a year they received 35s. per week, and in two years they received 40s. per week, and in three years 50s. because they had obtained considerable talent in carving; and one, who was the most skilful, received 60s. some time after, and when he had completed all the work that his employer required, he called upon me to thank me for the instruction I had given him, and informed me that he had just had an offer of four guineas and a half per week, and which he was going to accept.

Other instances of this kind I could name that have come under my notice, but this will be sufficient to shew that a right exercise and direction of the faculties for the arts of our operatives, would be in favour of all the parties concerned, to the employers as well as the employed. And why should so valuable a class of men have so little done for them in their education? Surely the great comforts derived by every class—and particularly the higher—from their labours, ought to induce the wealthy to come forward in their favour, and establish an institution for a due cultivation of their faculties in all matters that pertain to their calling. If such a school was established I need not state what would be the result; the workmen themselves would see into the great benefits that they would derive, and the superior order of men they would become by such an intellectual training. They would no longer delight in low pursuits, or dishonestly spend their last farthing in intoxicating drinks, reducing their wives and families to the lowest state of misery. With such a state of things they would soon be disgusted, and would arouse themselves from their animal state, and enter, heart and soul, into the intellectual culture that such an institution would offer to them. I trust that 'ere long we shall see such a project carried into effect, and by the parties concerned.

I am, Sir, &c.,

Geo. R. Lewis.

61, Upper Norton-street, Sept. 29, 1845.

ANCIENT ARCHITECTURAL DECORATIONS.

A writer in the *Sussex Advertiser* says—"On cleansing and scraping the old wash from the walls of Battle church, previous to their being rewashed, the walls have been discovered to be full of paintings, of a very ancient and curious character, some of them very well executed, which appear to have been done during the reign of one of the Edwards, or probably before; there is also some writing, but it cannot (except a word or so) be deciphered. Only a portion of the walls has been scraped. I am fearful the whole will not be similarly treated, as one of the churchwardens appears averse to any more being scraped, and, indeed, annoyed that such operations should have been commenced." It is to be hoped the local antiquaries will give their attention to this discovery, and exert their influence to obtain an examination of the whole of the building. The *Athenæum* mentions a similar discovery of great interest in the cathedral at Brunswick. "In removing the plaster coating from one of the lateral walls of the nave, they have found the latter covered with fresco paintings in its entire length and breadth. These are divided into compartments — each one containing a subject from the life of Duke Henry, surnamed the Lion, born in 1129, and who died in 1195 —the founder of the city of Brunswick, and builder of the Cathedral. The paintings are of the highest finish; but have, unhappily, suffered much from the removal of the plaster which overlaid them, notwithstanding the utmost precautions used in the operation. The government has ordered their careful restoration—as also their publication by engraving. They are supposed to be of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It is hoped that other frescoes will be found in the same edifice—probably on the opposite lateral wall, at any rate.

STATUE RAISING.

Sculptors abroad have been busy lately in works of commemoration; in some cases, as it seems, they might have had worthier subjects. At Dunkirk, for example, a colossal bronze statue of Jean Bart was recently inaugurated, who was nothing more than a successful privateer that flourished 150 years ago. The statue is 16 feet high, and is considered a masterpiece of the celebrated David (d'Anger). He appears in the act of boarding a vessel, brandishing a sword in his right hand, and a pistol in the left, and is attired in the costume of Louis XIV. To decorate the streets on the inauguration day, the pretty practice, common enough on the continent, was followed, of letting into the earth on each side of the pavement, large branches of elm and oak, so as to transform the streets into groves. We remember seeing all Ghent thus rendered into gardens a few years ago on a much worthier occasion.*

A statue is to be raised to Claude Lorraine at Epinal, and one at Aurillac, to Gerbert, afterwards Pope Sylvester II. The monument to William the Conqueror, at Falaise, in Normandy, is being proceeded with. In Germany no opportunity is lost to commemorate a great man. A statue of Erwin von Steinbach, the architect of Strasburg cathedral, has been raised at Steinbach, in Baden. Beethoven's statue, by Hahnel, of Dresden, inaugurated at the late festival, is a fine work. The features are boldly sculptured, and bear an expression of profound and earnest thought, mingled with the wildness of inspiration, which is seized to its full extent at the first glance. The figure is clothed in a costume which is a compromise between the modern dress and the classical robe, and the attitude, which represents him with a pencil and note-book in either hand in an interval of reflection, is easy and natural. The fault found with the statue is, that its vigour approaches too much to coarseness, and that its appearance is somewhat squatty. The pedestal, which, as well as the statue, is of bronze, bears four bas-reliefs, representing four allegorical figures of fancy, symphony, sacred music, and dramatic music. It was obtained by competition. The casting is admirably well done. At Nuremberg (Bavaria) some statuary has been set up at the entrance to the new Louis Canal, uniting the Maine with the Danube. It consists of a group, representing the river gods of the Maine and Danube, and bearing an inscription signifying that the canal, which was begun by Charlemagne, but abandoned, had been finished by Louis King of Bavaria. The other pieces consist of two columns, surmounted by Navigation and Commerce, personified by two female statues, with appropriate emblems. At Skanderborg in Copenhagen a marble equestrian statue of King Frederick VI., from a model by Thorwaldsen, has been set up. In England, amongst the new propositions is a statue of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, to be set up in Westminster Abbey in honour of his efforts to extinguish the slave trade. Wyatt's figure of the Duke of Wellington is nearly cast. The statue of the Duke of Sussex, ordered from Mr. E. H. Bailey by the Freemasons, is nearly finished. The whole figure is eight feet high, including a six-inch plinth; its weight is about six tons, and it is formed of one solid block of white Italian marble, from the quarries of Carrara, the original cost of which was 280 guineas: the price to be paid to Mr. Bailey is 1,800*l*. When completed, it will be placed on a five-feet pedestal, to be erected on the dais in Freemasons'-hall, which is at present being embellished and decorated. The public subscription statue of the Duke is intrusted we believe to the same sculptor. A bust of the late Admiral Sir F. Maitland has been put up in the dockyard chapel at Portsmouth.

* The chief honours of the Belgic University had been taken at the examination by three sons of townsmen, and all the inhabitants went out to meet them, and escort them to their homes in triumph.

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